News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Wednesday, August 9, 2006

Wyoming's First 2006 Human West Nile Virus Infection Identified

CHEYENNE – Wyoming's first 2006 human infection of West Nile virus has been identified in a Natrona County adult male.

According to the Wyoming Department of Health, the man is not experiencing symptoms and the West Nile virus (WNV) infection was detected during routine blood donor screening. The man had traveled recently to a neighboring state where other human cases have been found.

"There is no doubt West Nile virus is present in this area and others across Wyoming. It's very likely we will see more positive test results," said Dr. Mark Dowell, Natrona County health officer. "This disease is here to stay and people should continue taking measures to protect themselves from mosquito bites."

More information on WNV prevention strategies is available on the Wyoming Department of Health's West Nile virus website at: www.badskeeter.org or by calling the West Nile virus hotline at: 1-877-WYO-BITE.

According to Kelly Weidenbach, surveillance epidemiologist with the Wyoming Department of Health Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program, the timing of this test result is not unexpected. "While it continues to be difficult to predict from year to year the number of cases we might find in Wyoming, we typically see the infection rates rise during August," she said.

Human cases have been identified in most surrounding states. As of August 1, the Centers for Disease Control reports 19 cases in Idaho, 2 cases in Utah, 3 cases in Colorado, 2 cases in Nebraska and 13 cases in South Dakota.

As of August 7, two horses and no birds have tested positive for the disease in Wyoming for 2006. The WNV-positive horses were from Campbell and Fremont counties.

Last year 12 human cases were identified in Wyoming with two deaths. There were 393 human cases in 2003.

Most people infected with WNV do not develop symptoms. Of those people who do develop clinical illness, most develop mild symptoms such as fever, headache, body aches, skin rash and swollen lymph nodes. A very small percentage of infected persons develop West Nile neuroinvasive disease (i.e. meningitis or encephalitis). Symptoms of West Nile neuroinvasive disease may include severe headache, fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions and paralysis. People experiencing

any of these symptoms should contact a healthcare provider. The Wyoming Public Health Laboratory offers free WNV testing for healthcare providers with suspected cases.

The Wyoming Department of Health is continuing to solicit dead birds through the West Nile virus hotline: 1-877-WYO-BITE. The department prefers to test crows, ravens, magpies and jays. People finding a dead bird should call the hotline for instructions. If the bird is suitable for testing, callers will be advised on how to handle and submit the carcass. Persons will be notified ONLY if the bird is positive. For a number of reasons, not every bird that is submitted will be tested.

Those finding raptors such as hawks, owls or eagles should contact the Wyoming Game and Fish Department to arrange for carcass transport and testing. Persons with questions about horse testing should contact Dr. Todd Cornish at the Wyoming State Veterinary Laboratory at (307) 742-6638.

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